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NORTH CHICAGO -- While Great Lakes' Gate 4 has been open since May 21, the promise it offers to the economically challenged city outside it was celebrated Monday.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, and Mayor Leon Rockingham joined with Navy, state and county officials to formally open the newly renovated gate and intersection at Sheridan Road and Martin Luther King Drive, which is expected to bring thousands of sailors and civilians to nearby Sheridan Crossing, the city's planned 40-acre retail development.

Kirk has been discussing keeping the gate open until midnight -- now open 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. -- with Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter.

"Hundreds of people will use the northern exit for the base," Kirk said. "As they become accustomed to the new gate, entrepreneurs will be able to attract their business, eventually hiring more people and expanding the North Chicago economy."

Kirk thanked Rockingham and Alderman Jim Ellis for their work on the project and also thanked former alderman Mike Miceli, who proposed this project. The congressman pledged his support "to expand jobs and opportunity" in North Chicago.

Ellis, who owns and operates a gas station on Martin Luther King Drive just east of Green Bay Road, said he has seen an upswing in business since the gate re-opened.

Rockingham said the gate will translate to more development.

"It will give us a better traffic flow and a better traffic count to help developers attract new business in the area which is so desperately needed," Rockingham said. "It will also create jobs

for the citizens of North Chicago."

Kirk said the reopening of Gate 4 and redesign of the Martin Luther King Drive and Sheridan Road intersection cost \$5.5 million from the federal government, \$3.8 million from North Chicago and \$600,000 from Lake County. The Illinois Department of Transportation and Union Pacific Railroad also played key roles in the development of the new railroad crossing at the intersection.

Formerly known as the 22nd Street gate, the entry was first partially closed by Great Lakes commanders in November 1989 after three sailors were killed in two months while trying to cross the railroad tracks directly to the west. In 1990, the Navy closed the gate after the south leg of the Amstutz Expressway was built.